

Testimony
Suzanne Dennis
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My name is Suzanne Dennis, I am a Specialist Clinical Social Worker licensed in KS through the Behavioral Sciences Board. I worked in a community mental health setting specializing in deaf individuals for 18 years and for the past year, have been in private practice. During my years working in KS, I have been involved in numerous organizations on the state level as well as on the national level focusing on deaf advocacy and provision of services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals. I have direct experience in case management, vocational services, and therapeutic intervention.

Upon learning about the LEAD-K development that is sweeping the nation, I am excited that this bill is before you, am excited about the individuals who support this bill and the expertise we have within this state in order to support such.

Historically, deaf kids are usually forced to learn language with one modality – sign or English along with the traditional and misguided interventions that focus on only speech skills development. Our deaf children, who are visually oriented, do not get full access to language. Without full access to language, these children miss out on many cues that have direct bearing on intellectual, social and emotional development. Any deficit in the three that I mentioned usually has long-term effects that forever make it challenging in the long run. These challenges normally present themselves in counseling later on trying to deal with the inability to cope with whatever lack of functioning they have, shall it be social issues (relationships, identity-do not fit anywhere), emotional (depression, lack of self esteem or self worth), employment (lack of or doing remedial jobs), or scholastic (illiterate). All of these things do fall into the hands of the government later when money is spent on mental health, vocational services, and dependence on welfare.

We are all thankful these services are in place. However, if these services indeed NEED to be given, let it be provided for organic reasons and not for something that is a human right... access to language from birth.

Thank you for your time.